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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations and conflict prevention: a collective recommitment

I. Introduction

1. It is a difficult time to write about conflict prevention. The Syrian civil war is in its fifth year. Conflict and lawlessness persist in parts of the Central African Republic, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, South Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen and elsewhere. Conflicts are becoming more complex and intractable, and their human and financial toll increasingly intolerable. Against this backdrop, as I noted in my recent report on the future of United Nations peace operations (A/70/357-S/2015/682), some might question the strength of our collective commitment to the values and principles on which this Organization was founded, first and foremost the commitment to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

2. The primary responsibility for conflict prevention lies with Member States; Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations is very clear on this point. Experience has taught us that conflict prevention efforts must be nationally driven and nationally owned if they are to have a lasting impact. Consent is, and has to be, a core principle of our prevention work. However, while Member States bear the primary responsibility for conflict prevention, the United Nations, with its universal membership, impartiality and the legitimacy derived from the principles of the Charter, has an important and unique role to play. This role is, if anything, becoming more urgent in today's deteriorating peace and security context.

3. We have endeavoured to strengthen our tools for conflict prevention and improve how these tools are used, to ensure that they are employed in concert, across bureaucratic silos and in swift and innovative ways. The Organization has devoted considerable energy to technical improvements over the past years and will continue to do so. However, technical fixes are not enough; we need much greater political support for, and investment in, preventive efforts. Lasting peace comes only through political solutions. The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations made this point a central argument of its report (A/70/95-S/2015/446) and I fully concur. There can be no purely "technical" fix for what is always, in essence, a political endeavour.

4. Within the United Nations, we are engaged in a period of strategic reflection on several levels; this reflection is particularly timely given that 2015 marks the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the Organization. By the end of 2015, we look forward to a major Member State decision on a collective response to climate

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change. In addition, during the recent United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, Member States adopted the ambitious global development agenda. We have heard from a high-level panel and an advisory group of experts who have reflected, respectively, on United Nations peace operations and on our peacebuilding architecture. Both underscored the importance of conflict prevention and highlighted that prevention is a goal to which the United Nations as a whole must contribute. I have presented my own response to the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (A/70/357-S/2015/682), in which I set out an action plan based on three pillars, one of which is a renewed emphasis on conflict prevention and mediation. We will soon see the results of the global study that I commissioned on our progress in implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. I will also be putting forward a plan of action on preventing violent extremism later in 2015, and we are looking forward, in 2016, to the first ever World Humanitarian Summit.

5. This is thus a critical time to reflect on how our prevention tools have been promoted and strengthened throughout the United Nations system as a whole, and how they can continue to be reinforced, including through cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, to rise to the new challenges that we face today.

6. The present report was prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution 2171 (2014). Section II of the report considers the evolution of contemporary conflict and the prevention landscape in recent years. Section III provides an overview of our efforts to strengthen United Nations prevention tools and initiatives, highlighting our cooperation with regional and subregional organizations. Section IV considers key challenges and opportunities for conflict prevention, while section V concludes with observations.

II. Evolving landscape: contemporary conflict and prevention

7. Since 2008, the number of active civil wars has almost tripled, from 4 to 11, contrasting sharply with the long downward slope that we had witnessed from the early 1990s. Civilian populations have been increasingly targeted, and we are seeing the perpetration of alarming atrocity crimes. Conflict-related sexual violence continues to be used as a method of warfare and as a tactic of terror, intended to destroy the fabric of societies. By the end of 2014, the number of displaced persons had neared 60 million, an all-time high since record keeping began.[1]

8. In many cases, already-fragile State institutions are subjected to additional major stressors as disparate as illicit arms flows, environmental shocks and significant migration and refugee flows. The rise of powerful non-State armed groups, which have multiple agendas — political, economic and/or criminal — further complicate the already-complex conflict landscape. These groups, often with access to considerable financial and military resources, feed off and fuel conflicts that extend beyond national borders. This nexus in turn increases the risk of conflict onset and influences conflict duration, making prevention and resolution more difficult because of the multiplicity of actors and agendas. Adding yet more urgency

[1] The report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees entitled "World at war: global trends, forced displacement in 2014" puts the figure at 59.5 million forcibly displaced persons at the end of 2014.

is the fact that a particularly virulent form of violent extremism has emerged under the cover of several conflicts, with evolving tactics that include social media expertise, regional networks, territorial control, extreme brutality and the systematic use of conflict-related sexual violence. In a number of conflict settings, it remains unclear as to with whom mediators would engage, or what space there is for mediation efforts, given warring parties' maximalist objectives. Combined, all these factors contribute not only to the increase in the number of conflicts and their intractability, but also in some contexts to the erosion of social cohesion and the legitimacy of the State itself.

9. This deteriorating peace and security landscape has led to a growth in the number, size and responsibilities of peace operations — both special political missions and peacekeeping operations — as the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations documents in its report. As I noted in my follow-up report (A/70/357-S/2015/682), these operations are struggling to cope with the spread and intensity of conflict today. We have seen a concomitant proliferation of humanitarian emergencies, with the designation of four crises — in Iraq, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen — as level 3 emergencies, the highest possible United Nations classification.[2] This has translated into the overstretching of our response capacity and to ever-higher financial costs. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its partners launched a record global humanitarian appeal in 2015, with the overwhelming majority of the funds required to respond to the basic needs of populations in conflict-affected contexts. The $19.44 billion requested for 2015 represents nearly a 600 per cent increase from the $3.4 billion requested in 2004. What is more, significant shortfalls in funding have been chronic and growing: in Yemen, for example, the United Nations has received just 13 per cent of the $1.6 billion needed for humanitarian assistance.

10. The prevention landscape has also been shifting. Over the past decades, there has been great intensity of effort in the area of conflict prevention. The normative framework for conflict prevention has been strengthened at the regional and global levels. Member States made history in September 2015, during the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, when they adopted an ambitious and transformative sustainable development agenda for the next 15 years. The agenda breaks new ground in the way in which it recognizes the interlinkages between sustainable development, peace, governance, human rights and the rule of law. It is built on the premise that peaceful, inclusive and just societies are more likely to achieve their development goals, while development fosters peace and promotes inclusion. Prevention is mainstreamed throughout. Goal 16, on peaceful societies, justice for all and inclusive institutions, is the most explicit expression of these relationships.

11. In addition to new frameworks, we have noted an increase in the number and diversity of prevention actors. Regional organizations are actively engaged in mediation and preventive diplomacy and are sharpening their own preventive capacity. In some contexts, regional Powers are playing a central role in responding to crises, leading peace negotiations and providing capacity-building assistance and other expertise, often based on their own experiences. There is a growing network of international, national and local non-governmental organizations, especially

[2] The Central African Republic was a level 3 emergency until May 2015.

women's groups, with in-depth knowledge and experience in mediation and reconciliation.

12. The United Nations, with its universal membership, impartiality and the legitimacy derived from the principles of the Charter, has not only an important but in fact a unique role to play in complementing the efforts of national and regional stakeholders. Our field presence allows us to engage in quiet diplomacy very early on in ways that other actors cannot. Our impartiality and the important umbrella of my own good offices provide us with access to a diverse number of stakeholders with whom we can build trust and engage. In addition, the potential to approach issues in a multidisciplinary and comprehensive way, from a combined political, development, human rights and humanitarian perspective, is another distinctive characteristic of our work.

13. If the current global context teaches us one lesson, it is that international conflict management and resolution mechanisms have been stretched to breaking point. We now face real limitations in mustering more resources — funds, troops and political capital — to deal with the consequences of armed conflict. We urgently need to change our approach, broaden our set of tools and relieve the pressure currently placed on our emergency responses. Prioritizing conflict prevention is by far our most pragmatic and cost-effective option.

III. United Nations and conflict prevention

14. Conflict prevention, the core function of the United Nations, consists of efforts to stop violent conflict from breaking out, avoid its escalation when it does and avert its deterioration after the fact. Since the earliest days of the Organization, successive Secretaries-General have used their good offices to help to make prevention operational. Today, the United Nations engages in conflict prevention in various ways, and has built up, particularly over the past 10 years, a range of capacities that span the system. What follows is not an exhaustive list of all the conflict prevention tools at the disposal of the United Nations, nor is the assumption made of a linear progression from one set of activities to another, as indeed there is no linear path to peace. Rather, the following paragraphs contain a selective overview of some ways in which we have used and strengthened the conflict prevention tools of the United Nations in recent years, including in partnership with regional and subregional organizations.

15. My Human Rights Up Front initiative warrants a special mention. At its core is a strong focus on prevention of large-scale human rights violations, often correlated with an increased risk of conflict. Yet, it is more than another tool to add to the prevention compendium of the United Nations. It is nothing less than a push for cultural change throughout the United Nations system so that the prevention of serious violations of human rights is reaffirmed as a system-wide, core responsibility for all. Operationally, and crucially from a conflict prevention angle, this means that the system must work more closely and better together, with shared analysis and strategy, and aligning the actions and priorities of Headquarters and the field. This is more difficult than it appears, but I am committed to seeing through the full implementation of this initiative, and I see it as a major way in which I have strengthened the system to deliver comprehensively on conflict prevention.

Analysis and early warning

16. It is critical to identify potential conflict situations as early as possible. Our preventive engagements begin with early warning — good analysis of the dynamics on the ground to help to guide effective early action and engagement. Our analysis and our understanding of the situation improve with proximity, and in this respect the "ear" of the United Nations has never been closer to the ground. Resident missions in country, regional offices, human rights offices, United Nations resident coordinators, country teams and peace and development advisers, liaison offices, special envoys and advisers, and regular visits from Secretariat officials are among the many ways in which the United Nations plays a key role in picking up early signs of crisis or potential instability.

17. In recognition of the value of being, and the need to be, closer to the ground, three United Nations regional offices, for West Africa, Central Africa and Central Asia, led by the Department of Political Affairs, were established as "forward platforms" for preventive diplomacy. They are well placed to help to detect and decode brewing tensions thanks to the close working relationships that they have built with national and regional interlocutors. In 2014, the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) received additional resources from Member States to create a regional analysis capacity for improved early warning. I have also recommended an increase in the resources of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to strengthen its good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation capacities, as well as to support existing regional and subregional initiatives to address emerging security threats in the subregion (see S/2015/339, sect. IV and sect. V, para. 94).

18. Analytical capacity is also important for country-specific missions and I have established joint analysis units in some special political missions, building on the Joint Mission Analysis Centre model in peacekeeping and bringing together input from across mission components, as well as from across United Nations country teams. Where these have been established, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, the added value of the units has been their ability to provide analysis and early warning on cross-cutting, frequently regional, issues and their multidisciplinary personnel with expertise not readily available in peace operations.

19. Monitoring and early warning have traditionally rested on qualitative analysis, but we are increasingly also making use of survey data, including through public opinion research. An example of this includes the strategic context assessment undertaken in Sri Lanka in 2014 which, based on a perception survey, seeks to better understand the new triggers of conflict. The assessment served to create a national baseline and offers possibilities for adoption and use by national entities. It could serve as a reconciliation barometer and in the future create a base to track reconciliation efforts.

20. In my report on the future of United Nations peace operations, I outlined action that I intend to take to strengthen the Organization's analytical capacity. In particular, I decided to establish a small centralized analysis and planning capacity within my office to bring together the analytical work carried out by United Nations entities at both Headquarters and in the field in a way that informs my strategic decisions. I have also requested that existing conflict analysis methodologies throughout the system be revised to better enable a more integrated analysis of

specific situations, drawing on the political, security, social, economic, gender and regional dimensions of a conflict.

21. Monitoring and early warning are continuous activities, as important before a conflict as they are in a conflict resolution or post-conflict phase. The Peacebuilding Fund has supported several projects in this vein. In Liberia, for example, the Fund, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is supporting the Ministry of the Interior to help to establish peace committees at the district level to act as an early warning system and dialogue mechanism to catch tensions early. In Guinea, where preventive diplomacy efforts have been successful in the past and continue in 2015 to resolve tensions surrounding the electoral calendar, the good offices of my Special Representative for West Africa are reinforced by funding from the Fund and backstopped by the Department of Political Affairs. In addition, UNOWA, UNDP and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women are working on a Fund programme to build the capacity of women's networks from across the political spectrum to implement a conflict early warning system. This programme expands on a successful project that was implemented in 2013, and which has been replicated in several other countries in West Africa.

22. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has developed an early warning tool in the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. The Framework is an integrated analysis and risk assessment tool that can be applied to situations in all regions to identify those countries that are most at risk. It can also serve as a tool to develop preventive measures. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 28/34, took note of this new framework and encouraged Member States and regional and subregional organizations to use relevant frameworks, as appropriate, for guidance in their prevention work. The Framework is a public document and I encourage international, regional and national actors to use it.

23. The agents for information gathering and sharing are changing swiftly and a tremendous source of information comes from the Internet, social media and new forms of information technology. Referred to as digital diplomacy, I intend to make greater use of this new technology to further improve our early warning work, including better systems for briefing and presenting options to the Security Council at the early stages of potential crises. As an example of this effort, my staff are developing "Diplomatic Pulse", a tool to help to monitor official, open-source government information online and make better use of the data that they disseminate, including through the use of new data visualization techniques.

Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

24. A wide array of activities fall under the umbrella terms of good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation, much of them led by the Department of Political Affairs, my operational arm for this work. These terms epitomize what the United Nations was established to do and are perhaps best exemplified by the work of my special envoys, advisers and representatives, as well as by my own good offices. Over the years, these emissaries have been engaged in negotiating ceasefires and peace agreements, mediating border and electoral disputes, facilitating returns to constitutional order and promoting inclusive political dialogues, very often in close collaboration with regional and subregional organizations. They seek to ensure

that prevention is conducted within a framework that offers political solutions for lasting peace. They also often operate behind the scenes, engaging in quiet diplomacy to help to defuse tensions before they hit the spotlight. These discreet initiatives rarely make the news and, for obvious reasons, are not often formally documented, but they are a critically important part of our prevention toolbox.

25. Going hand in glove with their early warning work, the three Department of Political Affairs-led regional offices have been among our most effective operational tools for preventive diplomacy. Given their mandates and convening power, they are well placed to help Member States to address cross-boundary challenges such as transnational organized crime, piracy, or energy and water sharing, as UNOWA, UNOCA and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia have done. Regional offices can also support country-specific peace operations (peacekeeping operations and special political missions alike) in regional diplomatic initiatives. In the Central African Republic, my Special Representative for Central Africa chaired the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, working in close cooperation with the International Mediator on the crisis in the Central African Republic appointed by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), as well as my Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic.

26. Regional offices can foster inter-mission cooperation in their respective areas. UNOWA, for example, organizes biannual meetings of all my special representatives and special envoys in West Africa. Similarly, UNOCA hosted a meeting of United Nations presences in Central Africa in May 2015 on the main peace and security challenges in the subregion, with a dedicated discussion on upcoming elections. In recognition of the credible and discreet facilitation role that these offices play in addressing emerging or incipient conflict, and as I note in my report on the future of United Nations peace operations, I support the call by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations to establish additional regional offices, in North Africa, West Asia and Southern Africa as a priority, and I am exploring options with regional and national partners.

27. The proximity of regional offices allows them to establish strong ties of trust and familiarity with key actors. For example, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia regularly convenes deputy foreign ministers and deputy prime ministers from Central Asia to foster joint responses on water management issues. Building on these ties, regional offices are able to act early and in a coordinated way to prevent crises from escalating. The day after reports of unrest in Burkina Faso emerged in October 2014, my Special Representative for West Africa deployed to Ouagadougou together with his counterparts from the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). At the same time, the Department of Political Affairs sent a small multidisciplinary support team that worked hand in hand with the United Nations country team to support his good offices. This swift and coordinated response, and the senior-level engagement of all three organizations, represents an excellent case of good practice to positively influence developments in the wake of a sudden and potentially destabilizing change in government.

28. The deployment of small, multidisciplinary teams for prevention has in many cases proved to be an effective way for the United Nations to respond swiftly and

flexibly in situations of crisis, mission transition or when a United Nations representative or presence in country requires enhanced support. One example is the deployment in 2005 of a small team of United Nations staff to Nepal, where they supported the national authorities to engage in action to protect civilians and support political processes, which in turn created additional space for Nepalese political actors to prevent further deterioration and, eventually, resolve a long-standing armed conflict. In my report on the future of United Nations peace operations, I elaborated on this concept, which was also endorsed by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. It is important that such swift, multidisciplinary, small deployments, which operate under my good offices, become an integral part of the prevention toolbox of the United Nations, and a readily available operational response where circumstances warrant it and under or in close consultation with resident coordinators, as appropriate, and national authorities. I will continue to make use of these teams when appropriate.

29. A number of my special envoys and special coordinators have been mandated to work on regional strategies — for the Sahel, the Great Lakes region and the Middle East peace process — that include important prevention functions. My Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, for example, works closely with the African Union, as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region, but also the European Union and the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region, to support the full implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. My Special Envoy for the Sahel is supporting the Group of Five for the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger) and the broader international community to help to address the root causes of insecurity in the region through the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

30. In their efforts to keep conflict from spreading or relapsing, several United Nations peace operations with country-specific mandates, whether peacekeeping or special political missions, also undertake preventive diplomacy work. In Iraq, my Special Representative has played an active role in promoting enhanced relations between Iraq and its immediate and other regional neighbours, and has worked to enhance Baghdad-Erbil relations, including by supporting the negotiations on oil exports and revenue sharing, leading to a landmark preliminary agreement between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government on 2 December 2014. In Lebanon, my Special Coordinator has assisted the work of the International Support Group for Lebanon, which I launched in September 2014 in recognition of the considerable national pressure that the country faces as a result of the Syrian conflict. Composed of the five permanent members of the Security Council, Germany, Italy, the European Union, the League of Arab States, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNDP and the World Bank, the International Support Group has identified three priority areas for Lebanese stability: assistance for refugees and host communities, aid to offset the economic and social impacts of the Syrian crisis, and the development of the Lebanese armed forces.

31. The United Nations provides a broad range of electoral assistance to Member States, from technical assistance to engagement in the form of mediation and good offices. In most cases elections are peaceful events, but in some situations there is a risk that the results may not be accepted, existing and often deep-rooted tensions

may be exacerbated and violence may occur. In these instances in particular it is important that United Nations electoral assistance efforts combine political and technical assistance to support processes that are credible and that produce results that are accepted. In such cases, this approach can serve as a conflict prevention tool. The general elections in Nigeria in 2015 and in Kenya in 2013 are two examples of well-received United Nations engagement at both the political and technical levels in response to a heightened risk of election-related violence.

Violent extremism and atrocity crimes

32. The risk of violent extremism and atrocity crimes, which include genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, often increases in the same conditions that lead to a heightened risk of conflict. In these situations, we may use some of the same tools developed to prevent conflict, but I have also developed specific tools under the leadership of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and of my Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect, respectively.

33. The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force exemplifies the multidimensional but coordinated approach of the United Nations to preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism, in line with the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (see General Assembly resolution 60/288). The 37 Task Force member entities have been focusing on strengthening coordination and coherence to maximize the impact of their work, and on providing capacity-building assistance to Member States at the global, regional and national levels. Several Task Force activities focus specifically on the prevention angle. The joint project of the Task Force and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on conflict prevention and countering the appeal of terrorism in Nigeria through education and dialogue, which has given particular attention to the role of women, is one example. My plan of action on preventing violent extremism, which I will present to the General Assembly at its seventieth session, will take our collective prevention work in this area further, focusing efforts on a coherent approach to addressing the drivers of violent extremism at the local, national, regional and global levels.

34. I have already mentioned the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes developed by the Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect. More broadly, the Office engages with the United Nations system, Member States, regional organizations and civil society to identify and address emerging risks, provide technical assistance for the establishment of dedicated national and regional institutions for prevention, and help to foster the growth of international and regional atrocity crime prevention networks. In their work, the Special Advisers emphasize the importance of accountability as a tool for prevention. The experience in a number of post-conflict societies demonstrates that failure to adequately address crimes committed in the past, especially atrocity crimes, constitutes an important indicator of risk of recurrence.

Prevention and the women and peace and security agenda

35. Prevention is one of the pillars of the women and peace and security agenda as embodied in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The high-level review of the implementation of that resolution will look at my efforts to continue to make United Nations peacemaking efforts more inclusive, with an increasing involvement of women in United Nations-led prevention and mediation efforts, among other things. This is not just a principled endeavour; there is an underlying uncompromising rationale in pursuing gender mainstreaming across our prevention work, and it is quite simply that this leads to stronger analysis of the root causes of conflict in societies, and thus to better informed and better designed prevention and mediation efforts.

36. The Department of Political Affairs has developed tools and trains political officers to include gender-relevant analysis and recommendations in all my reports to the Security Council. In addition, I have deployed women's protection advisers to relevant field missions to ensure better monitoring, analysis and prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, which is increasingly being used as a method and tactic of war. The United Nations is also building partnerships between international civil society networks and local community groups, which often have a long tradition in mediating local disputes. The promotion of inclusive political processes, including by supporting women's political participation, in both elected and appointed positions, is another key element in building strong gender-sensitive national institutions for prevention.

37. There has been an upward trend in the appointment of women to leadership positions in the area of prevention in the United Nations. However, we must redouble our efforts. As at May 2015, only 4 women had been appointed in my good offices mission, including as my special envoys, advisers or coordinators, and only 6 of a total of 31 resident coordinators in conflict countries were women. My forthcoming report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) provides details of collective efforts to advance the women and peace and security agenda.

Working across the United Nations system for prevention

38. In its report (A/69/968-S/2015/490), the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture argues that strong emphasis must be placed on conflict prevention when considering peace and security and that peacebuilding should be understood primarily as an inherently political process. The Advisory Group also argues that it is unhelpful to divide limited energies and resources between intergovernmental and bureaucratic silos when so many United Nations activities, across the three core pillars of development, security and human rights, can contribute to prevention and to sustaining peace. Bridging these silos and bringing sustained attention to contexts of concern was precisely why the Peacebuilding Commission, its Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund were created. Without prejudging the outcome of the second stage of Member States' review of the peacebuilding architecture, the efforts of the United Nations system to build those bridges and work more coherently in partnership for prevention and for peace will continue.

39. Perhaps nowhere are these partnerships more important than in countries in which the United Nations has neither an envoy nor a mission, as is the case in most contexts. In these non-mission settings, resident coordinators and country teams are often propelled to the forefront of efforts to facilitate a crisis response, assisting national actors, at their request, in addressing emerging challenges. The UNDP-Department of Political Affairs Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention strengthens local capacities, as well as the resources of United Nations resident coordinators' offices and country teams, with expertise to look effectively at the nexus between peace and development, provide support to the establishment of national infrastructure for peace, ensure conflict-sensitivity in programming and work with national counterparts to identify entry points for prevention and peacebuilding initiatives. Through the deployment of peace and development advisers and by leveraging the expertise of the United Nations and resources at Headquarters and at the regional level, resident coordinators and country teams have been able to support national stakeholders to strengthen, develop and apply capacities and mechanisms for mediation, dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution in countries as varied as Kyrgyzstan, Malawi and Nigeria. Both the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and the Advisory Group of Experts commended the Joint Programme as an example of effective inter-agency collaboration on conflict prevention, and I encourage continued efforts to strengthen the partnership.

40. UNDP and various United Nations agencies on the ground engage in a wide range of "structural" or "upstream" prevention activities aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict before it spills over into violence. One example of such work is the UNDP parliamentary strengthening programmes, which focus on increasing political inclusion and participation of women, youth and minority groups as well as linkages between parliamentarians and civil society. Support to key institutions builds the channels needed to prevent the inevitable tensions that arise in all societies and that can descend or relapse into violence.

41. In 2014, the Task Team on Conflict Prevention was established as an inter-agency mechanism to provide a forum to raise awareness on conflict prevention issues, share information and identify priorities for the United Nations system; it also provides a forum to link the humanitarian and development agencies. In carrying out its functions, the Task Team seeks to leverage the field presence of participating agencies; technical expertise in conflict prevention and peacebuilding at the field and at Headquarters, as well as through the Conflict Prevention Community of Practice; and financial resources from some of the agencies to carry out activities such as conflict analysis, application of conflict sensitivity, and the development of tools and guidance that can benefit country teams.

42. Going forward, as I noted in my report on the future of United Nations peace operations, I intend to engage the broader United Nations system, in my capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, on how we can collectively strengthen our conflict prevention and peacebuilding work.

Deepening our partnerships with regional and subregional organizations

43. The architects of the Charter of the United Nations were visionary in foreseeing a world in which the United Nations and regional organizations worked together to prevent, manage and resolve crises. However, it is hard to imagine that they could have anticipated the multiplicity of actors and the interconnected nature of the threats that we face today, or the range of cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations that is born out of our collective search for solutions. Chapter VIII of the Charter is as relevant today as ever. The action agenda that I put forward in my recent report on the future of United Nations peace operations focuses on global-regional partnerships as one of its three fundamental pillars.

44. Many regional and subregional organizations have long histories of engagement in conflict prevention and mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Others are becoming increasingly active in these fields. Consequently, our partnerships differ by region and can involve a range of joint activities from desk-to-desk discussions, sharing of risk analyses, cooperation agreements, capacity-building and/or the deployment of joint envoys. These are built on respect for regional differences and a commitment to shaping our cooperation in a way that makes us best able to address a particular situation.

45. Our partnerships have already paid off in the realm of prevention, with successful cooperation in several contexts. The European Union and the United Nations have undertaken joint conflict analyses to explore the possibility of joint preventive actions; on a number of occasions, joint messaging from high-level envoys amplified impact. UNOWA and UNOCA have worked closely with ECOWAS, ECCAS, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Group of Seven Plus Friends of the Gulf of Guinea to mobilize support for the Gulf of Guinea maritime strategy to address the rising threat of piracy and armed robbery, as well as with ECOWAS, to help to develop the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy adopted in March 2014. Although challenges remain, the inauguration of the Inter-regional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea in Yaoundé in September 2014 and the West African Maritime Operations Centre in March 2015 were important milestones. In Southern Africa, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre cooperates with the African Union and SADC to support States in that region to adopt a regional preventive counter-terrorism strategy. UNOWA and UNOCA have worked closely with ECOWAS, ECCAS and the African Union with the aim of addressing the Boko Haram threat in countries of the Lake Chad basin, such as by conducting joint missions to countries affected by Boko Haram. Moreover, UNOWA and UNOCA are working closely with ECOWAS, ECCAS and the Lake Chad Basin Commission on holding a summit of Heads of State to address the root causes of the Boko Haram insurgency in the region in a holistic and integrated manner.

46. It is important to note that good offices are often led jointly by the United Nations and one or more regional and subregional partners, as circumstances may warrant. My Special Representative for West Africa works closely with ECOWAS, the European Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie in Guinea, with high-level representatives of the African Union and ECOWAS in

Burkina Faso and with the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security in Togo, for example.

47. I have also worked to further institutionalize these partnerships. Our network of liaison offices for key regional partners such as the African Union (in Addis Ababa), SADC (in Gaborone), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (in Jakarta) and the European Union (in Brussels) are one facet of this. Ensuring that these partnerships work well is the responsibility of everyone. I am frequently in touch with the heads of regional organizations through regular telephone contact and my travels to regions. I also convene heads of regional and subregional organizations during high-level retreats, most recently in May 2015 in New York. These efforts have fostered greater interconnectivity not only with the United Nations but also among constellations of regional organizations themselves.

Professionalizing our practice

48. There have been long-standing efforts to professionalize our prevention work at Headquarters and in the field. The establishment of the Mediation Support Unit, housed within the Policy and Mediation Division of the Department of Political Affairs, has been a central component in these efforts. The Unit is today recognized as an essential resource to support the good offices, mediation and facilitation work of the United Nations system and its partners. It seeks to get the right expertise to the right places at the right time, both by deploying personnel and providing remote analytical support. It does so by mobilizing its staff, members of the Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers, or identifying appropriate expertise from the mediation roster that it maintains. The Standby Team, a flagship tool of the Department, is a group of experts with significant experience in operational mediation contexts, who either deploy in direct support of preventive efforts and peace talks, or for training and capacity-building activities. The rapidly deployable and easily accessible expertise of the Unit has swiftly become a prized system-wide asset for prevention and for mediation work more broadly, and has significantly enhanced the operational readiness of the United Nations and its expertise on prevention.

49. Beyond this operational work, and perhaps less well known, is the considerable institutional learning and knowledge products that the United Nations produces on thematic issues that arise with regularity in prevention and mediation work. In addition to its human resources, the Mediation Support Unit also maintains the Peacemaker and Constitutionmaker online resource centres for mediation, constitution-making and preventive diplomacy efforts, serving as repositories of lessons learned, guidance products and other useful resources. Two recent examples of guidance produced by the Unit dealt with constitutional assistance, and natural resources and conflict. The Department of Political Affairs has also strengthened its evaluation system to ensure that it is assessing its performance and learning from its engagements. Recent learning products have focused on the efforts of the United Nations in the political crises in Maldives in 2012 and in Nigeria in 2015.

50. Capacity-building for the staff of the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations is another priority. The Department of Political Affairs has established or is collaborating in a large range of training courses on mediation and conflict prevention, aimed at senior, mid-level and junior staff. At the United

Nations high-level mediation course held in October 2014, the lead Algerian mediator in Mali and my future envoy for Yemen were among the participants. We also gave support to a workshop on conflict resolution, negotiation, mediation and constitution-building organized by SADC in March 2015 to help to build the capacity of women mediators from the region. The Department, together with UNOCA, provided support to Central Africa in the area of mediation by holding a training course for ECCAS staff members and participating in a workshop organized by ECCAS to review the institution's mediation architecture. We are looking forward to working closely with the African Union as it makes progress with its plans to build its own in-house mediation expertise.

IV. Key challenges and new opportunities

51. In many respects, the rhetorical battle on conflict prevention has been won: there is broad and strong Member State consensus on its centrality, as well as recognition of the unique and complementary role that the United Nations plays in support of national actors and in partnership with regional and subregional organizations. Yet, as the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations so plainly put it, the international community is failing at conflict prevention (see A/70/95-S/2015/446, para. 65). Our rhetorical commitments have not always translated into early and effective action to prevent violence. This failure is coming at a time when conflicts are more complex, intertwined and, if not addressed promptly, provide cover for intractable phenomena such as violent extremism to take root. Prevention has become more urgent and the risks of inaction have become greater. As noted by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, there is an unassailable logic in investing early and adequately in this area.

52. Beyond improving our technical tools and streamlining our bureaucracy, we need at least three other ingredients, too frequently missing, in order to hope to have more effective preventive engagement. First among these is Member State consent. Governments and leaders worry that preventive engagement on the part of the United Nations will undermine their sovereignty, internationalize a problem or legitimize an adversary. It can be extremely difficult to persuade them otherwise and the United Nations cannot and should not force itself upon the parties to a conflict. There are limits to what outsiders can do when the political space to act is not there. Notwithstanding these apprehensions, it is important to recognize that early preventive action to address brewing tensions protects rather than undermines State sovereignty by warding off the threat of devastating violence.

53. The second frequently missing ingredient is international unity, which is so crucial to giving the diplomatic work of the United Nations the leverage that it needs to tip the balance towards prevention or resolution. The Syrian Arab Republic remains a potent example of the disastrous results of disunity. Political unity and common messaging are equally crucial at the regional level. Disagreements between regional and subregional organizations, or even within one region, can stall effective engagement. There are occasions on which the United Nations and regional organizations simply cannot agree, either on the optimal division of labour for conflict prevention, or even on a shared analysis and understanding of a particular context. It is important to recognize that our work with regional and subregional organizations is built on conversations that are still evolving. While these partnerships are vital, they are not always easy.

54. The third missing ingredient is resourcing. The central paradox of prevention remains that a relatively modest investment before violence erupts could avert the necessity for the much more extensive resources required once prevention has failed. We have seen that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs global humanitarian appeal for 2015 already stands at $19.44 billion. This figure is likely to rise as the year progresses and does not take into account a host of other costs, including the costs borne by the affected countries themselves in human terms, as well as economic opportunity costs.

55. I have these figures in mind when I argue that prioritizing prevention can be a smart investment. Despite the urgency of prevention, we often have to rely on voluntary contributions of generous donors to fund critical United Nations work in this area. I agree with the statement of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations that it is unacceptable that core functions in support of prevention and mediation lack predictable funding. This is why, in my report on the future of United Nations peace operations, I call for significant strengthening of and more reliable resourcing through the regular budget of the Secretariat's core prevention and mediation capacities. I will present proposals in this regard to the relevant bodies in the near future.

56. The resourcing gap for prevention is made more dire not only by the deteriorating peace and security landscape noted earlier, but also by a higher rate of conflict relapse. Consequently, the need for sustained engagement, or of a joined-up "after-service" for the immediate days and weeks, but also years and decades, following an agreement, has also arisen. Keeping the parties focused, addressing issues as they arise, ensuring adequate resourcing for actual implementation, including institution-building, and carefully handing over to other parts of the system are all part of the equation. Rebuilding key institutions can take 20 to 30 years at best. This is very challenging when international attention inevitably shifts to the next crisis. This is precisely why the Peacebuilding Support Office was established — to help to sustain peace in countries making the transition out of violent conflict by garnering international support for nationally owned and nationally led peacebuilding efforts.

57. Part of the challenge of arguing for increased investment in prevention is that measuring impact and demonstrating results is inherently difficult. We are developing impact assessment tools and other capabilities to make our case more compelling.

V. Observations and conclusions

58. I have argued in the present report that the peace and security landscape is deteriorating and that prevention is becoming both more difficult and more urgent. The transnational nature of stressors, coupled with powerful non-State actors, compel us to think and act outside our disciplinary silos and work across borders to act regionally. In addition, the rapid rise of violent extremism has an impact on all our work and requires us to look at the drivers of this phenomenon and make prevention even more proactive and forward looking. The stakes are also higher, and there is a clear and new urgency for effective, collective action on conflict prevention. The United Nations is a unique actor in this space.

59. I have strengthened the Organization's prevention tools and will continue to do so, but this is not enough. I also intend to continue to seek to use these tools in a more multidisciplinary and joined-up way throughout the United Nations system as a whole. Yet these fixes remain in the realm of the technical and alone they will not suffice to ensure that we move from principled commitments to effective international preventive actions. In all my past reports on conflict prevention I have highlighted this gap between discourse and practice, and in my August 2014 briefing during the Security Council open debate on conflict prevention, I voiced my concern that this had led to a loss of credibility for the Council and for the Organization as a whole.

60. As the United Nations organ with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the role of the Security Council itself in preventing brewing crises from deteriorating is key. When quiet engagement is not sufficient, the Council's collective weight in support of prevention efforts is needed, in particular to contain rapidly deteriorating crises. This can create the political space for prevention that otherwise would not exist.

61. In recent years, the Secretariat has used various methods to enhance dialogue and foster more unity among Council members on cases of concern. We have made more energetic use of the "any other business" agenda item to provide briefings on emerging situations in informal consultations. I am committed to continuing to explore new formats and different ways to bring deteriorating situations to the Council's attention, for example by organizing informal briefings outside the Council chamber on various aspects of our ongoing work. We have listened carefully to the Council's requests for more interactive and candid briefings and have instructed our briefers accordingly. I have also continued my informal monthly luncheons during which many items that are not on any formal agenda can be raised. When to engage in discreet good offices, and when to use the muscle of the Council will always require judgement, as well as good, regular and frank dialogue. If we are to mend our current record on conflict prevention, one immediate step that we must take is to improve the nature and quality of the dialogue between the Secretariat and the Council, even or especially in situations that are politically sensitive.

62. Against this backdrop, I am calling upon the members of the Council and all States Members of the United Nations to recommit themselves to the principle of conflict prevention. This means, first and foremost, a political recommitment to the prevention principles enshrined in the Charter. It also means, however, a willingness to support the Secretariat in improving the quality of its interaction on prevention, both formal and informal, with the Council, and standing united behind these efforts when required. At this time of reflection, let us go back to the origins of the United Nations and the principles of the Charter, and redouble our efforts on prevention. The risks of inaction are simply too great.